Statement of
**Zsolt Nagy**, President-Elect
National States Geographic Information Council
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Chairman Putnam and honorable members of the Subcommittee, thank you for inviting me as President-Elect of the National States Geographic Information Council (NSGIC) to participate in this important hearing on *"Geospatial Information: Are we headed in the right direction or are we lost?"*

Mr. Chairman, we make maps for a living, so how can we be lost?

NSGIC is a non-profit organization that promotes effective government through the wise use and sharing of geospatial information. We provide a "voice of the states" to ensure that state and local efforts form the foundation of a sustainable National Spatial Data Infrastructure.

Members of NSGIC include senior state government managers and policy-makers involved in the daily coordination and application of geospatial technologies. Our members are non-partisan in their passion for good government.

The members of NSGIC have some concerns about geospatial coordination in our country, especially as it relates to our federal effort in data collection. It really should be viewed as a *national* effort. Rapid advances in technology have dramatically reduced the costs of geospatial systems which are increasingly used by state and local governments. However, to maximize the potential effectiveness of this technology, we need to be smarter about how we collect and maintain the nation's geospatial data.

The federal government must recognize that a new cross-cutting collaborative role is required to coordinate and leverage geospatial data investments. To put it simply, we cannot afford to have duplicative geospatial initiatives either horizontally among federal agencies or vertically among local, state, and federal levels of government.

NSGIC members perform much of their work through statewide coordinating bodies. The most basic principle of these bodies is "build it once, use it many times." This nearly always means that the data investment is more costly than if the data were prepared to meet lower resolution requirements of state or federal agencies. However, this one-time cost is still much less expensive than redundant, incompatible efforts by multiple levels of government. Accordingly, geospatial data must be built to address the requirements of local governments. With prudent adherence to basic standards, local government data can be "rolled up" to meet the needs of state and federal agencies. There are many advantages to this approach since locally used data is most likely to be maintained, accurate, and complete. However, it can be daunting for federal agencies to contemplate assembling a nationwide database from thousands of local governments, and we also know that many local governments do not have the data or are presently unable to produce it. This is where the statewide coordinating bodies can be most valuable.

Statewide coordinating bodies bring all of the relevant stakeholders "to the table" to coordinate development and support of geospatial data and applications that meet multiple needs. We know that the statewide coordinating bodies work. What we did not know until recently was how well they measure up on a national basis. Last year the NSGIC membership developed a set of nine criteria that define a model state coordination program. These nine criteria include:

- Having a paid, full-time coordinator
- Clearly defined authority for statewide coordination
- State coordination has a formal relationship with the state CIO
- A political or executive champion supports the coordination
- Responsibilities for the NSDI and a state Clearinghouse
- Coordination with local government, academia, and the private sector
- Sustainable funding
- Ability to enter into contracts and receive and expend funds
- The Federal government works through the statewide coordinating body

Late last fall, NSGIC conducted a survey among the 50 states to ask how many of these 9 criteria they met. The results were very interesting. Thirty-two states reported meeting 6 or more of the criteria, including nine states that meet all nine. Eighteen states reported meeting five or fewer of the criteria. What this tells us is that most states are well positioned to coordinate with federal agencies, and that there are opportunities to strengthen the remaining statewide coordinating bodies. At this time, there is no requirement for Federal agencies to coordinate with existing state coordination bodies.

We further believe that the effectiveness of the State Coordination Model can be gauged using the following success measures:

- Geospatial data will be available in a form that is usable to the public, private sector and government.
- The business requirements of all participants are met through coordination activities.
- Efficiencies can be demonstrated from coordination activities.
- All levels of governments are engaged.
- The statewide coordinating authority is a first point of contact for Federal grants, programs and initiatives.
- There is good coordination and communication between neighboring states.
- Duplication of effort and waste are eliminated.

It is important to note that a single "model" does not fit all states with respect to coordination activities or development of the National Spatial Data Infrastructure. While the majority of issues are in common, there are distinct differences due to geography, demographics, maturity of programs, political structure, local vs. federal priorities and regional issues for which we must account. In several instances, state and federal interests have recognized these issues and built very effective coordination mechanisms.

**NSGIC believes that a new Congressional initiative is needed that will establish a single federal agency, with cross-cutting authority, that can direct and speak for all federal agencies on geospatial development and coordination.** This agency would have the authority to coordinate all federal data production efforts with state coordination councils. This would likely require that a Federal employee be assigned to each state to work with the state coordination councils and to establish themselves as part of the local environment. NSGIC believes the additional costs for such a program are insignificant when compared to the potential to prevent the waste of several billion dollars. With the right models and effective partnerships with state coordination groups, federal agencies can work with states to build data and applications that meet their own needs and are useful at state and local levels to avoid duplication of effort. This measure would also provide Congress with a process to closely scrutinize all appropriations and expenditures for geospatial technologies.

In several **instances the hands of Federal employees have been effectively tied and they are prevented from coordinating appropriately with state, local and tribal governments.** Two particular issues are notable in this regard. First is the Federal Advisory Committee Act (FACA) which prevents federal agencies from putting state, local or tribal organizations on their advisory committees. The other concern relates to the inability of federal agencies to quickly survey user communities and stakeholder groups on important national issues, due to the federal limit on survey sizes. How can we expect federal agencies to make informed decisions on the management of the National Spatial Data Infrastructure when they are denied these essential feedback mechanisms?

**When data production programs are coordinated and stable, they result in significant savings** that can be used for data maintenance programs or other essential activities that are included in a complete National Spatial Data Infrastructure. For example, many types of data products require the acquisition of orthophotography and other imagery products such as LIDAR. It is well established that there are fixed mobilization, acquisition and management costs that are the same regardless of the size of the area to be imaged. States frequently find it is possible to save 20 to 40 percent of the acquisition costs for these products by letting statewide or regional contracts. The Federal government can sometimes leverage even greater savings in national programs such as the National Aerial Photography Program (NAPP) and the National Digital Orthophoto Program (NDOP) and it is important that we promote "seamless" national programs that provide equally for the "haves" and "have-nots" so that all of our programs serve the nation equally regardless of the economic status of certain regions.

**Data production requires stable partnerships** between Federal, state and local entities that each put up a share of the funds. Having stable fund sources allows us to plan for and execute data acquisition programs that make sense. We generally find ourselves having to work in opportunistic ways, because stable fund sources generally do not exist at any level of government. This instability causes many agencies to embark on their own production programs to make certain that their business needs are met. When this happens, they fail to cooperate with others or meet recognized standards and duplication is sure to follow. Effective data partnerships are built when each level of government knows that it can trust the others to uphold their end of the bargain year after year. It also helps to prevent the end of fiscal year "scrambles" that agencies

succumb to every year, that also often result in poor choices for data production. A final point on the stability of data production partnerships is that **a non-lapsing fund administered by the appropriate agencies for each of the NSDI framework layers would be an invaluable tool to help stabilize data production.**

The existing methods used to develop data standards can generally be measured in years. This is clearly not acceptable. For example, after 9/11, all levels of government moved to identify critical infrastructure and begin mapping these features along with the operational capabilities found within the emergency management communities. At the federal level, the National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency (NGA) established a team that developed the Homeland Security Information Partnership (HSIP) plan. They did a nice job of identifying common data needs, but this report is now eighteen months old and the states are uncertain if data models and standards are being developed at the federal level to support this list of data needs. As a result, many states and local governments are creating their own "standards" and they will naturally be reluctant to adopt a federal standard when it becomes approved in the future due to the inherent costs of converting their data that already meets their business needs. **Clearly, mechanisms are needed in the federal government to "fast track" standards development and other coordination issues to meet important national problems in a timely fashion (<6 months).** This requires available funding reserves that are dedicated for such activities to allow agencies to hire appropriate contractors for quick turnaround projects. These activities should also be conducted with the full cooperation of Advisory Committees that are comprised of state, local and tribal representatives.

In summary, we respectfully ask the Subcommittee to consider the following recommendations:

- Coordination of federal agency geospatial activities needs to be done in the context of *national* priorities, not just *federal* priorities. One key element of this is to work with and through the statewide coordinating bodies.
- Partnering with state and local governments is absolutely essential in meeting the country's collective geospatial needs. In states where the coordination infrastructure is weak, federal programs can provide a powerful incentive to strengthen them.
- Funding streams for federal geospatial programs must be adequate and sustained to support development and maintenance of data that meet local requirements through partnerships.
- Better mechanisms need to be in place for funding, partnering via grants and cost-share programs, as well as contracting to leverage the needs of federal programs for the joint benefit of state and local governments.

I'll close by saying, that there are many agencies involved in geospatial information technologies, and many are heading in different directions. We are not lost, but there are certainly opportunities to streamline, reduce costs, and yet meet many important national and local criteria for geospatial information. Borrowing from the well known phrase that "all politics are local," NSGIC submits to you that "**all data are local**."

Mr. Chairman and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to share these views with you today.